

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday

207 South Brodie St. Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>



Call to Worship

Yesterday we had lost so much
we lost the light
we lost the argument
we lost love
we lost life
we lost God
we lost Jesus

But this morning we found
the tomb - empty
the morning - bright
the gardener - walking
the stone - rolled
the disciples - running
the women - proclaiming
the resurrection - waiting
and Jesus - risen

It is good we have found our way here
this is Easter Day - love is back!

~ written by Roddy Hamilton and posted on the **New Kilpatrick Parish Church** website.
<https://www.nkchurch.org.uk/original-liturgy>

Hymn (Jamie Gerow)

Jesus Christ is risen today

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1. Jesus Christ is risen today, hallelujah!
our triumphant holy day, hallelujah!
who did once, upon the cross, hallelujah!
suffer to redeem our loss, hallelujah!
2. Hymns of praise then let us sing, hallelujah!
unto Christ, our heavenly King, hallelujah!
who endured the cross and grave, hallelujah!
sinners to redeem and save, hallelujah!
3. But the pain which He endured, hallelujah!
our salvation hath procured, hallelujah!
now above the sky He's king, hallelujah!
where the angels ever sing, hallelujah!

4. Sing we to our God above, hallelujah!
praise eternal as His love, hallelujah!
praise Him, all you heavenly host, hallelujah!
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, hallelujah!

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Opening Prayer

God of mystery and power, we have heard the Good News of Easter and we are glad to be caught up in its joy today. Your love fills us with expectation. Darkness will never overcome the light you shine in Christ Jesus. Just as Jesus spoke to Mary in the garden that first Easter day, you call each of us by name because you love us. We are so grateful for the hope we have in your resurrecting power, embracing us this day. So may we live our love for you gladly, today and every day, as our hearts sing full of praise with Easter joy.

And yet, God of mystery, we confess that faith doesn't come easy every Easter. When we face loss in our own lives, we sometimes lose track of the promise in Christ's resurrection. Sorrow can weigh us down. Our challenges can feel like a stone too heavy to roll away. Forgive us, O God, and let the joy of this day assure us that the power of your love will never let us go.

And as we prepare to hear the words of scripture and the message, may the Spirit of power and new possibility, open our minds to understanding, our hearts to loving, and our wills to carrying out the mission of the Risen Christ, God's Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

St John records Jesus' words: "I do not call you servants any longer, but I have called you friends. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Dear friends, Christ has laid down his life for us and invites us to love one another as he has loved us. Let us rejoice in his redeeming, resurrecting love.

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Scripture Readings – Pierre Nantais

❖ Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality,
³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by

hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

❖ **Matthew 28:1-10**

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”
The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

We are living in a time of global fear. If you are scrolling through Facebook, turning on the TV or listening to the radio, you know that there is fear in the world. This is normal. It is fear of contracting the virus that is keeping us in our homes, separated from loved ones, and away from our church on Easter morning. It is fear of having to go to work because you are deemed essential and then having to go back home to loved ones, hoping that you have done enough to protect yourself and them throughout the day. There is fear that there is not enough personal protective equipment to go around. And of course, the greatest fear, that we or someone we love will become ill and die. We know from the news that no amount of fame or fortune, power or prestige, can protect one from the illness.

We have big reasons to fear, but throughout life we face all kinds of fear. For some there are real phobias that they face daily, from the fear of heights, to the fear of leaving one's

home, the fear of public speaking, or of being seen as weak. These are not to be ignored. Some of our fears are not life altering, but still challenging. Each Sunday I have to preach, there is a little fear in me, as I think there should be. I am hoping that I have something of value to say, something that will speak to each person listening, something that reveals a little more of God to our hearts, minds, and bodies.

From the time I was a little girl taking piano lessons I have feared playing in front of others. When I was guarding at the local police station's holding cells in my home town, there was always a little fear. Fear that the ones being guarded might figure out where I live. Fear that they might try to hurt themselves when I was alone in the detachment, and fear that I might not know how to handle a critical conversation or situation. I feared moving across the country to study in Toronto. I had much trepidation when I went on the transit system as I am directionally challenged and can get lost pretty easily. Then, when I was in the hospital setting as a spiritual care worker, I feared not knowing how to help people get through whatever they faced, whether it was the adult man with learning challenges that thought he looked like a monster because of a skin graft on his face, to the man who had just been told by a team of doctors that he was not eligible for a lung transplant, which meant eventual death for him, to the mom who was dying, leaving three young children behind. I had my fears and for a time at least, had to hold theirs as well.

My point is that even though we are living through a time of global fear, fear is a part of living. Human beings with heart, mind, soul, and body fear things. And yet...in the scripture when heaven and earth meet, the words that we hear are "Do not be afraid." I could quote all kinds of scripture that speak about fear and God's assurance to not be afraid. Let me take just a few examples from the New Testament. When Luke tells of the virgin birth, heaven and earth collide and the angel says to Mary, "Do not be afraid." (Luke 1:30). When the shepherds in the field tending their flocks were greeted by a host of angels appearing in the sky, the angels' words? "Do not be afraid." (Luke 2:10). How about when Jesus walked on water in the Gospel of Mark 6:50 and says to the disciples, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Twice in the reading today we hear the words "Do not be afraid." The first comes at a moment when any of us would be afraid. The women have gone, as many have done before and after them, to visit the burial place of someone they loved dearly. It is supposed to be a peaceful, thoughtful, though grief filled time. And what happens? They experience an earthquake. Some of you may have experienced an earthquake and know first hand the out of control feeling and fear. All of us have seen the fear in the face of those who have been caught on camera or have spoken about the experience afterward. So there is an earthquake, but to top that off, heaven and earth collide as an angel of the Lord descends from heaven, rolls back the stone that has covered the opening of the tomb where Jesus lay and then, like a quarter back who has just scored a touch

down, takes a victory pose at the top of the large stone to show just how good this play is.

The scene is so overwhelming the guards watching over the tomb, to make sure no one steals the body, became like dead men. “But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.” (28:5-6). In the midst of an earthquake, dazzling light, and angel, fallen soldiers, and an empty tomb where their precious Jesus was supposed to be and now is not, the women are told not to be afraid!

Heaven and earth have collided, who wouldn't be afraid. We are told that as they quickly left the tomb they did so with fear and great joy! You know that feeling, when you can't believe what's happening? When you have experienced too much to let go of the fear, but the hope is now spilling into your soul and body as joy?

Filled with both fear and joy, they head off to find the disciples and another unexpected crazy encounter takes place. Jesus meets them on their way. This man that they saw beaten, mocked, crucified, the man they watched take his last gasping breath, was then buried and sealed in a tomb...that guy...meets them and says, “Greetings!” Now the English language translation does not do this justice, it is more like, “so wonderful to see you, be glad, rejoice!” This is a moment, and what was women's reaction? To bow down and worship, and as they do so Jesus says to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, there they will see me.”

We cannot explain away the resurrection. There is no way in human terms to explain God's capacity to do what God chooses. The resurrection is not based on what people do, no matter how good they are or how good what they do is. When we die the only hope we have is that God is who God says God is...the author of life and the conqueror of death. What we do know is that we should not be afraid. The resurrection is about hope, love, and forgiveness. It is about heaven and earth colliding, and when the two collide the words that we are to hear are, “Do not be afraid.”

I share with you, words penned by theologian Martin B. Copenhaver, as he explains what it means to not be afraid.

When the angel says, “Do not be afraid,” or when Jesus says, “Fear not,” it is not assurance that nothing can go wrong, because often things do go wrong. It is not assurance that everything turns out for the best, because, if we are honest about it, it seldom does. Rather, it is assurance that, whatever may happen to us, whatever a day may hold, God has the power to strengthen us and uphold us; that whatever we must face, we do not face it alone; that nothing we encounter is stronger than God's love; that ultimately God get the last word; that in the end – and sometimes even before the end - God's love is triumphant. Only

God can offer such assurance, and that is why, in the end, only God, or one of God's messengers can say, "Do not be afraid," and say it with authority. ¹

We are living in troubling times, but there is always something that comes up in life that troubles us, makes us afraid, so I share Jesus' words, "Do not be afraid." Not even death has the final word anymore. God is with you. God will give you strength enough for the day. God will bless you with the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control, when you place yourself in God's hands, trusting that no matter what the day or days bring, God's got you. Peace be with you.

Closing Prayer

God of power and possibility, you broke open the tomb that held our Lord. Now break into your church where your people are distracted by old quarrels, meaningless diversions, or unhelpful divisions about mission and service. Resurrect, renew and revive your church!

God of resurrection and new life, you broke into the hearts of Jesus' fearful friends. Now break into our relationships with one another. Where they are vibrant and life-giving, nurture them. Where they are strained by old hurts and misunderstandings, or carelessly taken for granted, Resurrect, renew and revive our life together!

God of might and mercy, you broke the schemes of those who stood in the way of your love. Now break into the governance of your world. Stir the minds and hearts of leaders to work for justice and equitable sharing. Where laws are corrupt, or people suffer under harsh rule, Resurrect, renew and revive the leaders of the world!

God of healing and hope, you broke the bonds of death which tried to shackle new life. Now break into situations of illness, pain, grief, and loss. Wherever people are sick in body, mind, or spirit, and wherever someone mourns the loss of any relationship or dream, Resurrect, renew and revive our lives!

God of Easter Renewal and Resurrection, you have broken into our lives again this day. Break into all our moments of celebration and joy. Give us gratitude, the impulse to share, and a spirit of grace and understanding. Resurrect, renew and revive our souls and spirits!

¹ Copenhaver Martin B. Feasting on the Word: Year A Volume 2 Lent through Eastertide. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P348, 350.

And break into the circumstances, places, and lives we name in the silence of our hearts... (*Hold a brief silence*)

Resurrect, renew and revive your people!

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Hymn

The day of resurrection

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1. The day of resurrection: earth, tell it out abroad,
the Passover of gladness, the Passover of God!
From death to life eternal, from earth unto the sky,
our Christ hath brought us over with hymns of victory.
2. Our hearts be pure from evil, that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal of resurrection light,
and, listening to his accents, may hear, so calm and plain,
his own 'All hail!' and, hearing, may raise the victor strain.
3. Now let the heavens be joyful; let earth its song begin;
let the round world keep triumph, and all that is therein;
invisible and visible, their notes together blend,
for Christ the Lord hath risen, our joy that hath no end.

Words: public domain

Invitation to the offering

We are witnesses to the power of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God. We offer our gifts and tithes in thanksgiving, eager to share the Easter good news of abundant life, forgiveness and grace with all the world. If you would like to make a donation to the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay please visit our webpage at standrewspres-tbay.ca for more information.

Benediction

Receive the good news: Christ is risen from the dead.
Tell the good news: the power of death shall no more oppress us.
Live the good news: we are free to love as he has loved us.

May God who raised Jesus from the dead bless you
and by the power of the Holy Spirit raise you with him in glory. Amen.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year A, Volume 1 © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press. P137.